



## **Kurt Dresner Urbanist Questionnaire 2025**

Kirkland City Council, Position 7

### **What are your top three priorities to achieve in your term?**

My top three priorities are fostering a more affordable Kirkland by increasing diverse housing options, creating a more connected Kirkland through expanded transportation choices like transit and active mobility, and building a more inclusive Kirkland where every resident feels a strong sense of belonging. These efforts will lay the groundwork for a thriving future.

### **How will you boost housing options, particularly for families of all incomes to live where they work? How will you engage the public for new shelters, transitional housing, emergency housing, permanent supportive housing? How do you weigh community objections with the housing goals for your jurisdiction, while encouraging engagement from neighbors?**

Creating more housing options requires an all-of-the-above approach. We must increase density in our urban growth centers and neighborhood centers while also optimizing our missing middle code to make the creation of those housing typologies not just legal, but feasible everywhere in our city. We cannot simply pile everyone into studio and 1-bedroom apartments along busy arterials.

For members of the public engaged in good faith and interested in solving problems for people experiencing homelessness, we should lay out the strong case for permanent supportive housing, et al. - that they are cost-effective solutions to a very



real need in our community. When you have actually met the people receiving these services, your perspective is very different from those who use only their imaginations. I think it is also important to be clear that we have legal obligations under, e.g. HB 1220 to plan for these types of housing, and we should prioritize engagement mechanisms with community members that produce constructive conversations and collaboration. This often means engaging earlier and in a more sustained manner, rather than simply hosting a "cage match" public hearing where everyone can shout at each other immediately before the vote.

**Do you support adding progressive revenue sources? Which ones would you support to fund your priorities? Or what cuts would you make to balance budgets facing increasing strain under Trump?**

Cities are unfortunately very limited in how they can collect revenue. In general, I support making Washington State's tax code more progressive as it is currently the third-most-regressive in the nation (only Tennessee and Florida are worse). For city finances specifically, I would like to see a shift toward a land value tax (LVT), meaning that instead of taxing land and improvements equally, we could start to tax land more and improvements less. Such a shift reduces penalties to property owners for making improvements, encourages compact development, and allows the city to more directly capture value added by public projects. However, this would likely be done in a revenue-neutral way. I recognize that it's unclear whether LVT complies with the uniformity clause in Washington's constitution.

I would like to see us fund active transportation in a more meaningful way. Our city struggles with the costs of sidewalk and bike lane construction, but I'd like to give the city a chance to vote to fund these priorities explicitly. Regarding cuts, I'm pretty



strongly opposed to multi-million dollar road-widening projects that do nothing to alleviate congestion, but cause more crashes and leave us with significantly higher ongoing maintenance liabilities.

**What do you think is the most important strategy your jurisdiction can pursue to limit cost increases and make the region affordable to live in? How would you go about implementing that strategy?**

Housing and transportation comprise half of the median household's budget. Those costs are borne even by people who have owned their homes outright for decades because when housing and transportation are expensive, the cost of almost everything goes up. Labor is more expensive because you have to pay people more to drive an hour each way to work in a city far from where they live. Whether you notice or not, you are paying for Kirkland's high housing costs every time you buy groceries, get your oil changed, or pay your property taxes. Ultimately, the only way to make housing in Kirkland less expensive is to have more of it. But given that it has taken us decades of underbuilding to dig ourselves into this housing shortage, it will take decades to dig ourselves out. In the meantime we need to ensure we are not disproportionately harming those who are most vulnerable. While I don't support all of them, the book "The Affordable City" by Shane Phillips has a laundry list of policies that can work together to rein in the cost of living. The broad strokes are to focus on the three S's: Supply, Stability, and Subsidy.

**Traffic deaths are rising across Washington state, with pedestrians composing an increasing share statewide. What is your approach to making our streets safer for all users?**



First, we need to recognize that trying to move automobiles at high speed through urban areas is, predictably, going to lead to injuries and fatalities. I'm delighted that the City is working on a new speed limit study, but changing a sign is not enough. Engineering streets that promote responsible driving is the gold standard. A few weeks ago I was working on a cleanup project along NE 70th St when an Audi R8 passed me going at least 80mph. It should be physically impossible to drive 80mph on NE 70th St. While we wait the generation it will take to reconfigure our streets, low-cost, rapid build projects can make a big difference in changing behavior. The second part is that we need to get serious about providing people with viable alternatives to driving. We need to recognize that when we make it possible for people to walk, cycle, and take transit with the priority, respect, and earnestness we give to driving, people will do those things. We should require the Transportation Commission to have at least one member who is not a driver. We should make sure we are actually living the modal priorities we've declared in our Transportation Strategic Plan.

**What is your approach to improving public safety over the next five years? How will you actualize it?**

According to conversations I've had with local law enforcement, from a crime perspective Kirkland is safe and getting safer. We need to keep that trend going. Some of that comes from further investment in the Regional Crisis Response Agency, which can dispatch a crisis responder when appropriate, leaving our police available for matters that require someone with a badge and gun. I believe we should see further emergency response specialization, especially if we can collaborate with neighboring jurisdictions. Crime, however, isn't the only public safety concern. Disaster and extreme weather preparedness and resilience work, as well as



efforts to increase the safety of our transportation system are vital to improving the overall safety of the Kirkland community.

**The Eastside faces unique challenges when it comes to affordability, transit connectivity, and suburban versus city identity. What are your thoughts on how we can envision the future of urbanism on the Eastside?**

We are long past the days when someone could look at Bellevue, Kirkland, or Redmond and say they are only suburbs - these are vibrant, working cities in their own right. As we see the effects of linking Redmond with Bellevue (and ultimately Seattle) with light rail, the blueprint for the future is becoming clear: enhancing connectivity to create opportunities for businesses, residents, employees, and visitors. Someone might live in Downtown Redmond but work in Bellevue, attend social and sporting events in Seattle, all without needing a car. K-Line and Stride BRT will tighten the bond between Kirkland and Bellevue in a similar way, even if the reliance on congested streets and freeways leaves something to be desired. Eastside cities are going to need to collaborate more closely on how to build further connections. Imagine a joint project by Kirkland and Redmond to rehabilitate the NE 85th St/Redmond Way connection between their downtowns and provide transit priority, protected bike lanes, and wide sidewalks for safe, easy, and direct travel! The better we connect our Eastside cities, the more we'll enjoy the positive agglomeration effects. We should focus on those connections, and neighboring cities should be explicitly partnering toward that goal.

**Do you support camping bans or sweeps? If elected, how would you adapt or change current law/policies to protect and support our neighbors?**



In limited circumstances, I support banning camping in specific areas such as parks, and even then only when there is an alternative that can be offered. Despite the Supreme Court's *Grants Pass* decision, I believe it is unethical (and counterproductive) to criminalize homelessness and would reject efforts to do so. Kirkland's continuum of care is very robust for a city of our size, and I would continue to invest in our Homelessness Assistance & Response Team, and I would support the policy in Resolution R-5631 declaring that Kirkland takes a person-centered, proactive approach that prevents homelessness from happening in the first place where possible, and short and non-recurring otherwise.

**In what ways could your city's comprehensive plan go further, and what would you push for to improve it during your tenure?**

HB 1220 makes it clear that we are obligated to plan across the income spectrum for housing that is attainable. I would like to see the comprehensive plan provide more clarity on how exactly Kirkland plans to meet its affordable housing targets. I would also like to see more concrete goals and approaches for reducing per-capita vehicle miles traveled.